



## Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

### Food Safety After a Flood

- Floodwaters may carry silt, raw sewage, oil, or chemical waste, which can make storm-damaged foods unsafe to eat. If you have a question about the safety of any item, dispose of it.
- Discard the following foods if they have been exposed to floodwaters:
  - Fresh produce, meat, poultry, fish, and eggs
  - Any food in boxes and sealed packages even if the contents seem dry
  - Food in glass jars, including unopened jars with waxed paper, foil, cellophane or cloth covers
  - Home-canned foods (Some tightly sealed home-canned foods may be safe depending on conditions. Contact a food preservation specialist or local health department for advice.)
  - Preserves sealed with paraffin; spices, seasonings, and extracts
  - All opened containers and packages
  - Foods in bags or canisters
  - Cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted; cans that have been tossed about and are far from their normal storage spot
  - All foods that were covered by water that may have been contaminated with industrial water, including foods sealed in unopened cans

- Cans of food that do not have dents or rust can be saved if they are handled properly before they are opened.
  - Be sure to wash and sanitize undamaged containers before opening the can. For added safety, boil food before using.
  - To disinfect undamaged cans, remove paper labels (paper can harbor bacteria) and relabel with a permanent marker.
  - Wash the containers in a strong detergent solution. Use a brush to remove any dirt and silt.
  - Rinse the scrubbed containers.
  - Wear rubber gloves to protect your hands during the disinfection process.
  - Immerse the clean, rinsed containers in a lukewarm (75 to 120 degrees F) solution of chlorine for two minutes. Use 2 tablespoons of 5 percent chlorine bleach per gallon of water.
  - It is important to change this disinfecting solution frequently. It must be dumped if you see the water starting to lose its clarity.
  - Remove the containers from the bleach solution and allow them to air dry before opening or storing. Use disinfected containers as soon as possible because they may rust.

*Adapted from resource material developed by the North Dakota Extension Service entitled "Coping with Floods: After the Flood Information"*